CATALOGUES OF ART EXHIBITIONS ORGANIZED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
45 South Street
Bishops Stortford
Herts CM23 3AG
England

Somerset House
417 Maitland Avenue
Teaneck
New Jersey 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1975

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers

Serial numbers: Each title is given a seven-figure serial number in the top right hand corner of the microfiche title strip. This is an accession number. The first figure indicates the number of the list in which the title first appears; the first three-figure group signifies the gallery or museum; the second three-figure group the accession number for that title.

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Technical data:

Producing laboratory: Micromedia Ltd, Kidlington, Oxford.

KAREL VOGEL
1897-1961

an exhibition of small bronzes

Arts Council 1963

Foreword

Soon after the artist's death the Arts Council welcomed the suggestions that it should arrange a memorial exhibition of work by Karel Vogel, but it was not till this year that it was possible to place this exhibition in our gallery. In the meantime a large exhibition of his work was held at the South London Art Gallery and a touring exhibition was arranged by the Midland Area Museum Service. We have therefore confined ourselves here to his small bronze figures which are perhaps among the most characteristic of all the works which he produced.

The Arts Council is especially grateful to the artist's widow, Mrs K. M. Vogel, for her valuable help and advice, and for lending us so many pieces of her late husband's work. We should also like to thank the other owners who have most generously lent to this exhibition. The Council is further indebted to the Camberwell Borough Council's Art Committee for agreeing to let us reprint in our catalogue the biographical chronology and the introduction by Professor E. H. Gombrich which appeared in theirs.

This exhibition will be shown at:
Arts Council Gallery, London. August 31 - September 28
Bradford City Art Gallery. October 19 - November 10

G. W.

All enquiries concerning the purchase of works should be addressed to the Director of Art, Arts Council of Great Britain, 4 St James's Sq, SW1

Introduction

Karel Vogel was a dedicated artist who went his own way regardless of the clamour of slogans and the noise from the bandwagons. His formative years in Central Europe fell into the period of the triumph of expressionism, but he chose the path of self-effacing humility in front of nature. He was convinced that all the hectic strivings for a new style that produced the kaleidoscope of twentieth-century art only resulted in eclecticism, a choice of manners that easily degenerated into fashions. Not that he lacked an appreciation of the power of style, that spell of simplicity in archaic art and the strength of conventions that shaped the art of classical Greece no less than the porches of mediaeval cathedrals—to mention only his favourite periods. But he was convinced that these traditions of formal discipline could not be recovered by an act of will. Having lost them, the sculptor had to renounce the hope of carving images from the stone that would match the effortless monumentality of those great ages. What remained was the study of nature, and the natural medium for this act of submission was modelling. If there is anything timeless in this world of flux it is our response to the beauty of the human body, and it was in this natural response that Vogel saw the best hope towards a regeneration of art. This conviction made him the inspiring teacher he was. He knew how to open the students' eyes to the individuality of the model and make them forget their own mannerisms and preoccupations. And he gave them the satisfaction of acquiring a skill of hand and sensitivity to nuance that are the indispensable tools of the sculptor's craft.

Those of us who were privileged to know Dr Vogel will always remember his zest for beauty, his love of music, his love of travel; his favourite word when recounting his experience was 'unbegreiflich schoen', which means literally 'inexplicably beautiful', the beauty, that is, that passes human understanding. However, there is nothing stilted or pompous in the German term, which so handily expressed the artist's sense of joy and wonder. It was this feeling of almost religious awe in front of the mystery of beauty that made him look on wilful distortion or self-expression as irrelevant if not worse. Yet it was in this act of renunciation that he most expressed himself. In his portraits no less than in his statues and small bronzes he knew how to wrest from nature that sense of classic form that he so admired in the Greeks. If there is one word that more than others sums up this quality that gives unity to his work it is poise. That poise is not imposed from outside: it comes from the innermost centre of a born artist who, throughout the tragedies and vicissitudes of our frenzied times, was at peace with nature.

E. M. Gombrich

Biographical Chronology

1897 Born at Ceske Budejovice in Southern Bohemia, now part of Czechoslovakia.

1916 From High School, Prague, entered University to read Classical Archaeology and History of Art; also worked at Academy of Decorative Arts and Crafts.

1922 Doctor of Philosophy degree.

1922-4 Studied at Academy of Fine Arts, Prague, and later in same year at Vienna under Professor Hanak.

1924-39 Worked as a sculptor in Prague. During this time he produced some 60-70 portraits; sitters included Kokoschka, Otakar Fischer, Oscar Kraus and Max Brod.
Life-size figure bought for State Gallery and smaller figures for Modern Gallery, Prague.
In 1938 he was unanimously proposed to Chair of Sculpture, Academy of Decorative Arts, but with the arrival of the Nazis he left Prague.

1939-40 Emigrated to England, living first in London. Exhibition at Cooling Gallery. Portrait of Myra Hess.

1940-5 London studio bombed and he moved to West of England. Lectured to H.M. Forces. Made portraits and figures, including portraits of the Duchess of Devonshire and Dame Agnes Hunt. Exhibited at Lefevre Gallery.

1945-8 Became part-time teacher at College of Art, Liverpool, and continued his outside lectures. Portraits of Learie Constantine, Professor Lyon Blease and others.

1948-57 Returned to London to take up post as Senior Lecturer in charge of the School of Sculpture, Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts.
Built new studio at Chiswick. Here he made a number of life-size figures, one of which belongs to Harlow New Town and was shown at the Open Air Exhibition of Sculpture in Battersea Park, 1960. Here also he carried out a number of large architectural commissions, including three large reliefs for the Pavilion of Power and Production, Festival of Britain, 1951.

1959 Large figure commissioned by London County Council for Hammersmith by-pass. During this period portraits of Mrs Alec Guinness, Dr Redcliffe Salaman, Claude Rogers, Rafael Kubelik and many small bronzes.

1961 Died in March at the age of 64.

Catalogue

All works date from the period 1954-60, and are lent by Mrs K. M. Vogel unless otherwise stated.
Measurements are in inches.

1 Standing figure h. 20½

2 Draped standing figure h. 12

3 Standing figure with arms folded h. 12¾

4 Standing figure with hands together h. 12½

5 Leaning figure h. 12½

6 Standing figure with hand on neck h. 10½
Lent by Cyril Frankel, Esq

7 Standing figure h. 9½
Lent by Michael Salaman, Esq

8 Standing figure holding forearm h. 9

9 Standing figure with hands on hips h. 7¾

10 Standing figure looking down h. 7

11 Standing figure with hands together in front h. 7

12 Standing figure with elbows raised and right hand on hip h. 6½

13 Figure leaning against bank h. 7

14 Torso h. 14½

15 Seated figure with hands on back h. 13½

16 Draped pregnant woman h. 10½

17 Mother and child h. 9¾
Lent by R. E. Hemphill, Esq, MA, MD, DFM

18 Seated figure with hands on left leg h. 9¾

19 Woman combing hair h. 8¾
Lent by Arthur Kauffmann, Esq

20 Draped seated figure h. 7

21 Draped figure seated on bar h. 6½

22 Figure seated on ground, holding up right leg h. 5½

23 Figure seated on ground h. 5½
Lent by Mrs P. N. Fox-Edwards

24 Figure seated on bar and holding ankle h. 4

25 Seated figure with left leg resting on right knee h. 7½
Lent by Martin Wilson, Esq

26 Reclining figure resting on bar l. 12

27 Reclining figure supported on elbow l. 18
Lent by Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts

28 Reclining figure with hands clasped behind head l. 17

29 Figure resting on elbow, holding foot h. 6½
Lent by Oswald Falk, Esq

30 Bathing figure h. 6½

31 Stooping figure h. 5½
Lent by Sir Alec Guinness, CBE

32 Stooping figure touching ankle h. 5½

33 Crouching figure with arms crossed h. 9½

34 Crouching figure with hands on ground h. 5½
Lent by Mr and Mrs Angus Stirling

35 Kneeling figure with elbows on ground h. 7½

36 Standing boy h. 8½
Lent by Mrs Nancy Raphael

37 Seated man h. 6½
Lent by Professor V. L. Ehrenberg

38 Boys wrestling h. 5½

39 Boys wrestling h. 6½